

State Commission

The Montana Governor's Commission and Office of Community Service (OCS), also known as ServeMontana, administers eight AmeriCorps programs mobilizing more than 400 AmeriCorps members to address needs in economic opportunity, education, environmental stewardship, and healthy futures. OCS supports preparedness through ReadyMontana campaign, engages youth in service through ServeScholarships and Global Youth Service Day, and encourages citizens to be registered organ donors. OCS augments volunteerism with ServeAwards, Gift of Life Ceremony, and Volunteer of the Game award. Each event is unique and provides opportunity for participation by the Governor and Commissioners. ServeMontana collaborates with the CNCS State Office to assure programs are supported, service activities meet needs, and members have meaningful experiences. The CNCS Montana State Directors holds an ex-officio seat on the Commission and frequently engages in activities. ServeMontana's 2016-18 State Service Plan prioritizes meeting needs with consideration of CNCS focus areas and Governor initiatives. The plan emphasizes partnerships with Tribal Nations and identifies opportunities for addressing pressing needs.

AmeriCorps State

The Big Sky Watershed Corps (BSWC) is an AmeriCorps program that assists Montana's communities in making a measurable difference in local conservation efforts while strengthening the experience of young professionals. Throughout their 1,700 hour AmeriCorps terms, BSWC AmeriCorps members improve and restore critical habitat, build community partnerships, increase awareness of water resource issues, and engage local citizens to become more involved in their communities. Over the past four years, 59 members have improved more than 91 miles of public waterways, educated nearly 35,000 Montanans on environmental practices, and recruited more than 4,100 volunteers who have helped restore and preserve critical habitat. BSWC AmeriCorps members have also served to bridge the gap between diverse stakeholders once at odds with each other by promoting collaboration. The paradigm of "agriculture versus environment" is shifting and the BSWC has worked hard to take the lead on this initiative. The BSWC is a collaborative partnership of three statewide nonprofit organizations, the Montana Watershed Coordination Council, the Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Montana, and the Montana Conservation Corps.

Justice for Montanans AmeriCorps members serve statewide to empower low to moderate income Montanans to advocate for their legal rights and increase access to justice. The 18 members serve with Montana Legal Services Association, Court Self Help Law Centers, the Office of Consumer Protection and Victim Services, and the State Bar of Montana. In the 2014-15 year, they provided legal information to 24,756 people who otherwise would have been left to navigate a confusing and overwhelming legal system on their own. Members also recruited and managed 234 community volunteers, including pro bono attorneys, to help provide legal resources and civil legal representation to Montanans. Additionally, the AmeriCorps members reached more than 13,000 people through five campaigns to increase awareness of legal rights and resources. Providing these services means that Montanans have access to safe housing, protection from unfair consumer practices, and safety for their children. The members help break down the economic and social barriers that keep people in poverty by providing access to the justice system.

AmeriCorps National

FoodCorps has 10 AmeriCorps members serving in Bigfork, Boulder, Bozeman, Browning, Butte, Hardin, Kalispell, Missoula, Polson, Red Lodge, Ronan, and Somers. FoodCorps is a nationwide team of AmeriCorps leaders who work under the direction of local partner organizations to connect children to real food and help them grow up healthy. They teach children hands-on lessons about food and nutrition build and tend school gardens, teach cooking lessons, and help change what's on lunch trays so that children can eat healthy food from local farms. In the past year, the FoodCorps members in Montana served 9,445 children, built or brought back into use 10 school and community gardens, harvested 2,287 pounds of produce, and recruited 366 community volunteers.

In the past year, five Jesuit Volunteer Corps Northwest AmeriCorps members served at St. Paul's Grade School in Hays. Four members were teachers and one member was an Academic Support Specialist, and all focused on meeting the academic needs of 20 Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Native American students. The Academic Support Specialist gave individual and small group attention to students who needed help with math and reading. In this remote reservation community, the Jesuit Volunteer Corps AmeriCorps members provided leadership for the 21st Century Program. This afterschool program's academic enrichment is especially valuable in its high-poverty, low academic performance setting. Every day, the members helped students to improve their social skills with peers and staff, increase their academic performance through individual homework help, develop positive study habits, exercise, play games, and have healthy snacks.

AmeriCorps VISTA

Montana Campus Compact AmeriCorps VISTA member Alessa Kiviat helped build the capacity of the Children's Museum of Bozeman's K-12 STEM Education Project. Her efforts helped make the museum a key provider of out-of-school STEM learning opportunities in Gallatin County, and allowed the museum to reach more low-income youth. Ms. Kiviat developed and launched STEAMlab, a mentor-based program where children from diverse backgrounds learn about electronics, coding, 3D design, and robotics. She developed a volunteer placement process that recruited STEAMlab mentors from MSU-Bozeman and the local business community. These volunteers have contributed 275 hours of service. Recruited mentors also support the Gallatin Girls Coding Club, where six to ten girls complete coding projects each month. Ms. Kiviat organized volunteers to deliver STEM enrichment activities at the United Way's after school program in Bozeman, which reaches a high percentage of low-income children. They also developed curriculum and marketing materials for STEAM Saturdays, a monthly program for low-income families, and raised \$7,235 in cash and in-kind donations to support the project.

Billings Metro AmeriCorps VISTA member Erica Zutz designed and implemented the Billings Blue project to expand and enhance services for local military families and veterans in need. This initiative helped local active military and veteran service providers increase their capacity to get funding. This allows the providers to increase the number of active military and veterans who can be served. Ms. Zutz established a partnership with local Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1634 to raise funds for childcare scholarships for military families in need. She partnered with local businesses to create the Billings Blue Veteran Discount List, a resource directory of over 60 organizations committed to helping local service members. Ms. Zutz secured a \$1,000 Allegra FootPRINT Fund Grant to print the Billings Blue Veteran Discount List, merchant window stickers, and marketing materials to distribute directory information. In total, Ms. Zutz raised \$9,415 in cash and in-kind resources. As part of the initiative, Billings Mayor Thomas Hanel proclaimed November Active Military Family Support Month.

AmeriCorps NCCC

An AmeriCorps NCCC team partnered with The Helena Family YMCA to make improvements to their camp and help with after school and summer programming. The Helena Family YMCA is dedicated to building self-esteem and enriching spirit, mind, and body for people of all ages and economic status by focusing on youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility. Helena has above-average high school dropout and youth substance abuse rates and disengaged students and families. In the community, 14.5 percent of the people live below the poverty level and more than 40 percent of Helena elementary students qualify for free or reduced lunch. NCCC members built bunk beds, fire pits, and an archery range; painted houses; restored a building; and installed an access ramp. Members also engaged youth in service at the camp and served in community outreach at the Kiwanis Club and Food Share. At Bryant Elementary, the team tutored kindergarten – 5th grade students and drove some students from Bryant Elementary to Helena Middle School for weekly activities. The team also led community volunteers in a clean-up day at the YMCA.

An AmeriCorps NCCC team partnered with the Bigfork Playhouse Children's Theater to help with infrastructure improvements and after school programming. The Theater produces a yearly series of youth-oriented theatrical productions at the Bigfork Center for the Performing Arts to encourage and train youth in all aspects of theater. The Bigfork ACES provides afterschool activities that include tutoring and mentoring, music, art, recreation, cooking, gardening, STEM, and social enrichment classes. While serving at the Theater, NCCC members replaced an old tin roof; prepped, primed, and painted the entire first floor of the theater; and took out old flooring and installed new linoleum and carpet. Members served youth with the Bigfork ACES at least twice a week, doing physical activities and arts and crafts. They mentored the children through creative adventures and guidance in healthy interpersonal communication. Thanks to the team's work, facilities are cleaner and safer and the youth have more access to opportunities.

Senior Corps Foster Grandparent Program

Irvin "Whitey" Miller serves 40 hours every week as a Rocky Mountain Development Council Foster Grandparent at Jefferson School in Helena. The Council's Foster Grandparents serve in nine counties. The Helena School District estimates that 36 percent of its students function below their age-appropriate academic level and are at risk for early school failure. Last year, 49 percent of the students served by the Council's Foster Grandparents showed academic improvement. Mr. Miller is one of nine Foster Grandparents in Helena elementary schools, and has served for nine and a half years. On a typical school day, he sees 15 students who need individual support, and gives them one-on-one attention to improve their math, reading, and study skills. At age 86, he has the distinct honor of being the youngest WWII Veteran alive. He served in WWII, Korea, and Vietnam, and continues giving service by being a Foster Grandparent.

Senior Corps RSVP

Since its initiation in 2006, the Lunch on Us program in Miles City has grown to serve free lunch to 50-65 in-need high school students and community members weekly. In the 36 weeks of the 2014-2015 school year, RSVP volunteers served 1,314 hours to provide 2,403 meals. The total cost was \$3,106, or about \$1.25 per meal for students who otherwise wouldn't get a nutritious lunch. Approximately 20 percent of children up to age 17 in Custer County live below the federal poverty level, and Custer County is defined as a USDA low-income and low-access food desert. Before August 2015, Custer County District High School did not have a lunch program, so low-income and homeless students had no place to eat during the day. To address this issue, RSVP volunteers started serving lunch each Wednesday during the school year through Lunch on Us. RSVP volunteers plan menus, buy ingredients, and cook and serve meals. Lunch on Us is funded entirely by mini-grants and as cash and in-kind donations from the Miles City community. For her work with Lunch on Us, RSVP volunteer Esther Helmila won the 2014 Miles City Senior Citizen Volunteer of the Year Award.

Senior Corps Senior Companion Program

Without any local family, one Plentywood senior resident depleted her personal savings paying out-of-pocket expenses for in-home health services that weren't fully covered by Medicare. No longer able to afford in-home care, she turned to Action for Eastern Montana for Senior Companion assistance. Thanks to her Senior Companion, she has the support she needs to stay in her own apartment. Without her Senior Companion, she would live in a nursing home, costing taxpayers \$47,780 in Medicare and Medicaid contributions. A nursing home in Montana costs an average of \$70,263 a year. Residents pay about 32 percent of the cost, Medicaid pays 61 percent, and Medicare pays 7 percent. The client's Senior Companion costs \$7.95 per day, or about \$200 per month. This client's Senior Companion have a federal cost of \$2,400 annually, so taxpayers save \$45,380 by delaying use of Medicaid funds for nursing home placement. Action for Eastern Montana serves a large rural area spanning 15 counties and the Fort Peck Reservation. Its Senior Companions give isolated and low-income seniors services that allow them to stay healthy and independent.

Social Innovation Fund

The John A. Hartford Foundation Social Innovation Fund (SIF) programs in Montana have served more than 1,200 people in rural community health settings. The SIF is investing \$97,000 to expand the impact of five nonprofits in Montana. The SIF transforms lives by using evidence to find what works and make it work for more people. The SIF Classic and SIF Pay for Success programs harness the expertise of grant-making intermediaries to identify, evaluate and expand effective nonprofits serving low-income communities.